DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 137 886 CS 501 700

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TITLE Predictors of Interpersonal Communication Apprehension in the Acquaintance Context.
PUB DATE 76
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (62nd, San Francisco, December 27-30, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; *Anxiety; College Students; *Communication (Thought Transfer); *Communication Problems; *Friendship; Interaction; *Interpersonal Relationship; Research; *Self Esteem
IDENTIFIERS *Communication Apprehension

ABSTRACT

Seventy-eight subjects between the ages of 19 and 76 participated in a study to determine which characteristics of interaction with acquaintances discriminate between people with high degrees of communication apprehension and those with low degrees of communication apprehension. Subjects rated themselves for self-esteem and rated the degree of similarity and of liking between themselves and an acquaintance. The results of a discriminant analysis indicated that liking, background similarity, and self-esteem were significant predictors of communication apprehension and provided reasonably accurate classification of individuals with high and with low interpersonal communication apprehension. (Author/AA)

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PREDICTORS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION IN THE ACQUAINTANCE CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine which perceived interaction characteristics discriminate between high and low apprehensives in the acquaintance context. Subjects rated themselves on self-esteem and rated similarity and liking between themselves and an acquaintance. The results of the discriminant analysis indicated that three variables (liking, background similarity, and self-esteem) were found to be significant predictors of communication apprehension and provided reasonably accurate classification of high and low interpersonal communication apprehension.

Paper presented to the Speech Communication Association Convention
Interpersonal Division
San Francisco, 197t

CS 501 700

PREDICTORS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION IN THE ACQUAINTANCE CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research was to investigate empirically the concept of interpersonal communication apprehension in the acquaintance context. Specifically, the study sought to determine significant predictors of apprehension. Variables considered in the analysis were similarity, liking, and self-esteem. The following review of literature examines the notion of the acquaintance context and establishes a rationale for the examination of the predictor variables.

The Context

Dyadic relationships occur in a number of different contexts. Wright (1969) in his review of the interpersonal attraction literature stressed the inadvisability of attempts to generalize to a wide variety of social structures (contexts) without first carefully considering the differences among the interpersonal relationships in each. One context worthy of study is that of "acquaintances." For the purposes of this study, a definition for the acquaintance relationship was derived from the work of Brenton (1974). The subjects were asked to consider an acquaintance as someone with whom they enjoy chatting when they meet unexpectedly and with whom they may get together several times a year. Further, an acquaintance is someone in whom there is very little investment in terms of time or self. There is a degree of formality present and there is more trust present in the relationship than there is between strangers, but not as much as there is between friends. As this study defines the context, the acquaintance dyad would be in the sampling and bargaining stages as described by Thibaut and Kelley (1959) and Secord and Backman (1964). The sampling stage is the sifting process by which people select those other people with whom they will choose to have more involved relationships. Once a person has decided on the basis of sampling that another person is someone with whom he would like to have a closer relationship, the relationship moves into the bargaining stage during which the people get to know each other better. A relationship that is moving through these two phases is the type of dyad of concern to the present writers. Despite the bulk of literature on communication apprehension little information is available about apprehension in the acquaintance context.

Communication Apprehension

In terms of sheer numbers, little doubt remains that the problem of communication apprehension is widespread in our society and needs to be examined more closely. McCroskey and Leppard (1975), have observed that communication

apprehension is indeed a "handicap" and that even based on the most conservative figures, it can be safely estimated that there are at least as many people suffering from debilitating communication apprehension as suffer from all other handicaps noted by HEW. According to Wheeless (1971), at least 10 percent of the college student population experiences severe communication apprehension which interferes to a major extent with their communication effectiveness. An additional 30 percent, or a total of 40 percent or more, have sufficient apprehension to warrant special treatment outside of the classroom environment (Garrison and Garrison, 1975).

While it may be obvious that the handicap of apprehension is a widespread phenomenon, many significant dysfunctional effects have also been reported in the literature which suggest that communication apprehension is a variable of great importance to the field of speech communication.

The greatest amount of research in this area has centered upon the effect of apprehension on communication behavior. By definition, apprehension is negatively related to the amount of communication. Further, it has also been related to the amount and type of communication in various contexts.

Sorensen and McCroskey (1973) found that apprehension was a significant predictor of small group interaction, specifically of tension, interest, and verbosity. Daly and McCroskey (1973) extended these effects to the individual as a receiver of communication. They noted that "not only does high communication apprehension affect the individual as a source of communication, but it also affects the way in which the individual receives communication from others. Many times, the apprehensive will be so anxious about the communication situation that he or she may not function well as a receiver of communication" (p. 2).

High apprehensives are also perceived as less credible and less attractive in small groups (Quiggins, 1972) and they interact less than low apprehensives (Wells and Lashbrook, 1970). Other research in interpersonal settings indicates that high apprehensives engage in far less disclosure of information than low apprehensive counterparts, and that this affects the entire tone of their interpersonal relationships (Hamilton, 1972). Most recently, McCroskey, Daly, Richmond, and Cox (1975) reported that high apprehensives tend to be less interpersonally attractive to others as well as less attracted to others.

The conclusion, then, is that communication apprehension is both a widespread and significant problem. While the greatest amount of research has focused upon public speaking apprehension, much of the above research and the interests of this paper are interpersonal communication apprehension. To date, little is known theoretically about the predictors and correlates of apprehension. This study attempts to deal with such concerns.

Similarity

The purpose of this section is to present a rationale for the inclusion of similarity as a significant predictor of interpersonal communication appre-

hension. An examination of the literature suggests that individuals who perceive themselves to be similar are more likely to interact with one another, communicate more effectively, and be less apprehensive with one another than dissimilar individuals.

Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) suggested that when a person can interact with any one of a number of different others, there is a strong tendency for him to select another who is like himself. Having selected the similar other, the amount and depth of interaction increases which tends to create greater consensus and similarity between them. Homans (1950) concurred with this notion, stating that "the more nearly equal in social rank a number of men are, the more frequently they will interact with one another" (p. 134). Wheeless (1973) utilized a selective exposure paradigm to suggest that if a person perceives himself as similar to another, he will be more likely to expose himself to that similar other. More recently, McCroskey, Richmond, and Daly (1975) identified four dimensions of similarity (attitude, value, appearance, and background) and suggested that perceptions of these factors will determine to a major extent whether there is a communication attempt made. Once two individuals interact, the literature supports the hypothesis that their resultant communication will be more effective if they perceive themselves to be similar. Rogers and Bhowmik (1970) concluded that "when the source(s) and receiver(s) share common meanings, attitudes and beliefs, and a mutual code, communication between them is likely to be more effective" (p. 529).

Very little empirical research has sought to draw the direct relationship between similarity and apprehension. The preceeding literature, while not specifying causal directionality, suggests that a relationship exists between similarity and the amount and quality of communication. Given the relationship suggested earlier between the latter variables and apprehension, it seems plausible that apprehension and similarity would also be related. Thus, the present study would hypothesize that similarity is a significant predictor of interpersonal communication apprehension.

Liking

While on the surface liking would seem to be a fairly straightforward concept, its usage appears to be more common than its definition is clear. Current research examines liking from a number of viewpoints and contains several consistencies.

One approach is centered around the idea that communication is an uncertainty reduction process. Essentially, this view (Berger and Calebrese, 1975) holds that uncertainty in a given situation leads to seeking out similar others who in turn reduce the uncertainty of the situation and, through self-disclosure, about themselves. This self-disclosure leads to increased liking. In a correlational sense, decreases in uncertainty should tend to increase liking, while increases in uncertainty should have the opposite effect of decreasing liking.

Lalljee and Cook (1973) used pulse rate and speech rate as empirical indicators of uncertainty and concluded in part that as verbal communication between two strangers increases, the associated uncertainty between them decreases

and vice versa. At the same time, the content of that communication alters drastically. As uncertainty is reduced, and communication increases, information-seeking behavior decreases.

Self-disclosure, brought on first by the respondent's information-seeking behavior and ultimately by the increased communication of the agent in a stranger dyad appears to be positively related to liking. Several investigators have concurred that the amount of communication and liking were so related (Worthy, Gary, and Kahn, 1969; Sermat and Smyth, 1973; Moran, 1966; Lott and Lott, 1961; and Shaw, 1971). An accompanying intimacy increase (Berger and Calebrese, 1975) is also linked to greater liking by Pearce and Sharp (1973).

All of these researchers have begun with uncertainty, and using the concepts of information-seeking behavior, self-disclosure, and intimacy, have correlated their findings with liking. This research means that initial interactions between acquaintances are likely to be stimulated by the uncertainty of the situation and as uncertainty is reduced about both the situation and the new acquaintance, liking is a natural outcome.

A second approach to liking research, the similarity approach, is very closely related to uncertainty reduction in that uncertainty reduction relies upon seeking out similar others. However, this research emphasizes the content of the self-disclosure process. Heider's balance theory (1958) is the most commonly used theoretical base for empirical research in this area. Separate entities which are similar tend to be perceived as having a unit relationship. According to Heider's theory, positive unit formation (e.g., similarity) should induce a consistent sentiment relationship (e.g., liking). He suggested, of course, that this process should also operate in reverse: liking for another should lead to the perception that a consistent unit relationship exists (e.g., someone the person likes is thought to be similar). A positive relationship between attitudinal similarity and attraction (liking) has been found with great regularity (Byrne and Nelson, 1965; Byrne and Clore, 1966; Byrne and Griffitt, 1966), although the amount of attitudinal similarity which actually exists may be significantly less in some cases than the amount of similarity the participants perceive (Byrne and Blaylock, 1963 and Levinger and Breedlove, 1966).

Each of these findings has significant implications for the interpersonally apprehensive communicator. To the extent that apprehensives are poor receivers of information (Daly and McCroskey, 1975), they can be expected to both generate and fail to respond to greater uncertainty in dyadic interactions. In a transactional sense, apprehensives would first not participate in greater self-disclosures and, secondly, quite possibly not be receptive to the disclosures of their partner in an interpersonal dyad. As a result, according to the first view of liking, information-seeking behavior would be stifled and uncertainty would be increased, if changed at all, thereby having a direct and suppressing effect on liking between the interactants. The second point of view indicates a direct relationship between similarity and liking. While the causal nature of the relationship has yet to be established, given the earlier analysis linking similarity to apprehension, liking would also appear to be related to communication apprehension. Therefore, the present study would hypothesize that liking is a significant predictor of interpersonal communication apprehension.

Self-Esteem

The preceding sections have posited certain relationships between similarity, liking and communication apprehension in acquaintance dyads. A crucial factor in all these relationships is self-esteem, how an individual views himself.

Self-esteem was defined by Branden (1969) as "the integrated sum of self confidence and self respect." Fink (1962) viewed self-esteem as "the attitudes and feelings that a person has regarding himself," while Morse and Gergen (1970) defined it as the evaluative component of self conceptualization. Rogers (1951) concurred with the notion of evaluation in terms of internal and external states when he noted that the self structure is "composed of such elements as the perceptions of one's characteristics and abilities; the percepts and concepts of self in relation to others and the environment." Thus, evaluations of self are much more than restrictive internal states. Self-esteem also inherently involves external conduct, successes, and failures.

Several studies (Fitts, 1972; Branden, 1969; Gergen, 1971; Kwal and Fleshler, 1973) have established that self concept is a central and critical variable in human behavior. Fitts suggested that it is perhaps the most essential element of interpersonal communication. Kwal and Fleshler (1973) concluded that "the self concept is the fundamental determinant of our perceptions and, therefore, our behavior."

Branden (1969) posited that there is no factor "more decisive in his psychological development and motivation than the estimate (the individual) passes on himself." Branden extended this analysis of motivation to suggest that self-esteem "is the single most significant key to (man's) behavior." It is clear, then, that an individual's evaluation of himself will be a very significant motivating force for his behavior. To the extent that communication is a form of behavior, then, one must expect self-esteem to be related to such behaviors.

Evidence of such a relationship has been established in various contexts. Communication may be considered a form of behavior which constitutes a potential threat to a weak self concept. Nelson (1964) found that an apprehensive student is probably disturbed by interpersonal encounters. "He may be overwhelmed by so many intense feelings that he cannot stand the threat to an already confused self-esteem." Harris (1968) and Di Bartolo (1969) stated that negative self concepts are closely related to anxiety. Kwal and Fleshler (1973) agreed that one risks unintentional exposure of negative aspects of self in an open, free response. In addition Branden (1969) suggested that if a person "remains silent" because he fears rejection he may lose self-esteem, and if such situations recur, it can be assumed that the loss of self-esteem will be even greater. Low self-esteem individuals tend to withdraw and make few attempts at communication, and they have less confidence in their own opinions and judgments. Conversely, high esteem individuals tend to initiate communication, to influence others, and be less susceptible to influence (Hare, 1962; Gergen, 1971; Kwal and Fleshler, 1973).

Ferullo (1963) found that "better speakers" tended to have a higher self-esteem than did poor speakers. Low esteem (poor) speakers reacted to the public speaking situations with "tension, strain, or anxiety." Hare (1962) concluded that small group members with high self-esteem initiated more communication and interacted more freely than did low esteem members. Kwal and Fleshler (1973) found that low esteem group members tended to withdraw and make few attempts at communication.

Dittes (1959) agreed that self-esteem is sometimes positively, sometimes negatively correlated to anxiety depending on whether the other is seen as accepting or rejecting (positive or negative). The determinants of this correlation appear to be the extent to which needs are satisfied and the strengths of the needs. (Low esteem individuals, experiencing greater discomfort and more apprehension, tend to seek social approval and reinforcement from attractive and/or similar others.) Thus, low esteem, high apprehensive individuals will prefer communication with attractive and/or similar others. The effect for such relationships, then, is less apprehension and higher esteem. Thus, the relationship of self-esteem to communication behavior is strongly suggested. Specifically, the literature suggests that both constructs are internal or "intrapersonal" processes (or states) which significantly determine external behavior.

Both communication apprehension and low self-esteem, it appears, are the result of prior conditioning. Children who are punished or ignored for their communication attempts become apprehensive. Similarly, those who are consistently punished for their behavior tend to develop a low regard for themselves. Gergen (1971) suggested a relationship between failure and resultant losses in self-esteem. He concluded that individuals low in self-esteem tend to be less confident in their opinions and judgments. "They typically have not benefited from the praise of others." While the causal nature of the relationship has yet to be established, it is clear that apprehension and self-esteem are related. Thus, the present study also hypothesizes that self-esteem is a significant predictor of interpersonal communication apprehension.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Interpersonal Communication Apprehension

The measurement of communication apprehension was pioneered by Gilkinson (1942) in his development of the PRCS (personal report on confidence as a speaker). Subsequently, McCroskey (1970) was responsible for the development of the PRCA (personal report of communication apprehension) which extended and refined the concept of communication apprehension beyond public speaking anxiety alone.

Given the scope and direction of the present investigation, however, it was necessary to develop a situational measure of apprehension which related specifically to interpersonal communication apprehension. A preliminary measure consisting of 30 items was drawn up and administered to 107 subjects at the University of Nebraska. The preliminary seven point semantic-differential-type scales were adopted from the PRCA (interpersonal scales only) and a

committee of graduate students in communication. Four items which were highly loaded in the initial factor analysis were eliminated due to their emphasis upon group communication. The subsequent factor analysis yielded a five-item measure. This new scale was called the Measure of Interpersonal Communication Apprehension (MICA).

Similarity

The concept of similarity was defined in this study as the degree to which respondents indicated they perceived a named acquaintance to be similar on the attitude, value, and background dimensions of similarity isolated by McCroskey, et. al. (1975). Four semantic-differential-type 7-point scales for each dimension were utilized, making a 12-item similarity questionnaire.

Liking

The review of literature, while finding a substantial amount of liking-related research, provided no commonly accepted operational definition, nor any generally agreed upon scale for measuring liking. A cross-contextual instrument consisting of 7 point semantic-differential-type scales was utilized for the measurement of interpersonal liking (Sullivan, Garrison, and Merker, 1975).

Self-Esteem

By contrast many measures of self-esteem are available in the literature. For the purposes of the present study, a 35-item Likert-type measure developed by Berger (1952) and administered to 123 undergraduates was factor analyzed (Robertson, 1975), resulting in a 10-item questionnaire.

METHOD

Subjects

This study was conducted during the fall of 1975 in two settings. Forty-six subjects enrolled in various undergraduate courses at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as well as 32 subjects from the Westminister Presbyterian Church of Lincoln, Nebraska, were utilized. A total of 78 subjects of varying age (19-76) participated.

Administration of Research

The questionnaire was administered to both groups of subjects. Each subject was given a definition of an acquaintance and asked to specifically choose one acquaintance and respond to the items, when indicated, with this relationship in mind.

Statistical Design

The data from each instrument was first submitted to ATSCALE, a computer program designed to determine the reliability of the measures and to discover whether the items constituted a single factor. These items provided scores for apprehension, liking, attitude similarity, value similarity, background similarity, and self-esteem. This process was necessary in order to assure proper predictor variables for the main analysis.

The test of the hypotheses was made via discriminant analysis. This procedure seeks to find the linear combination of variables which best discriminate between levels of a criterion variable. (Tatsuoka, 1971). The predictor variables consisted of the final liking, attitude similarity, value similarity, background similarity, and self-esteem measures. The correlation matrix of these variables (Appendix B) indicated that the predictors were independent. On the basis of the final apprehension measure, high apprehensives and low apprehensives were identified via a median split of the scores. These classifications constituted the two levels of the criterion variable. The significance test used in the analysis was Wilks' Lambda.

RESULTS

The results of ATSCALE data analysis (Cronbach's Alpha Reliability) on each of the three dimensions of similarity (attitude, value, and background) the interpersonal liking scales, self-esteem, and MICA scale are reported in Appendix A. All measures reached acceptable levels of reliability.

The results of the stepwise discriminant analysis indicated that the discriminant function included three variables: liking, background similarity, and self-esteem. Table 1 summarizes the results of the MDA with Wilks' Lambda, the final F value, and discriminant weights for each predictor variable included in the discriminant function.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 2 reports the results of the prediction of the discriminant function. 74.6 percent of the low apprehensives and 73.7 percent of the high apprehensives

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Insert Table 2 about here

Table 1
Results of Discriminant Analysis

Variable	Wilks' Lambda	Sig.	F Value*	Discriminant Weights
Liking	.8687	.001	11.484	.77892
Background Similarity	.8516	.003	6.535	-.38378
Self-Esteem	.8229	.003	5.310	.37377

*All F Values obtained were significant with alpha = .05.

Table 2
Prediction Results*

Actual Group (MICA)	N	Predicted Groups (MDA)	
		Low	High
Low	59	44(74.6%)	15(25.4%)
High	19	5(26.3%)	14(73.7%)

*Percent of cases correctly classified: 74.36%.

were correctly classified. Thus, a total of 74.36 percent of all subjects were properly identified by the discriminant function obtained in this study. Computation of the omega squared statistic revealed that approximately 16 percent of the variance was accounted for by the discriminant function.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study generally confirmed the hypothesized relationships between similarity, liking, self-esteem, and communication apprehension, and correctly classified 74 percent of the individuals into the appropriate high and low apprehension categories.

The hypothesis that similarity is a significant predictor of interpersonal apprehension was confirmed to the extent that the social background dimension was significant at the .05 level. It appears, then, that individuals who perceive their acquaintance to be similar in social background experience less interpersonal communication apprehension. This suggestion lends support to Homan's (1950) notion that similarity of social rank brings people together and, thus, contributes to a desire to communicate. The attitude and value dimensions of similarity were not confirmed as significant predictors. It should be noted that some subjects expressed confusion about the directions for the similarity scales. If the measure were treated as a semantic differential scale without meanings assigned specifically to each point of the scale much of the expressed confusion could have been avoided.

The hypothesized role of liking as a predictor of communication apprehension was confirmed at the .05 level, which supports both the use of an interpersonal liking scale and the general belief that people who like each other tend to be less apprehensive in interpersonal communication. Conversely, those who dislike each other are likely to be far more apprehensive.

In acquaintance relationships, these findings suggest that during early bargaining stages strangers make interpersonal judgments concerning their perceived liking for others in dyads. This judgment can be used to predict the amount of communication apprehension each person will feel. According to the literature review, the apprehension level may in turn affect the entire tone of the relationship by interfering with self-disclosure, increasing uncertainty about both the people and the situation and thus affecting further perceptions of liking. Highly apprehensive communicators will accelerate their initial negative liking perceptions and probably eventually withdraw from the dyad. Liking is, then, an important predictor of what will ultimately occur in the interpersonal dyadic relationship.

It is generally accepted that self-esteem is a central and critical variable in human behavior, and that an individual's evaluation of himself is a very significant motivating force for his behavior. It was hypothesized that self-esteem would be a significant predictor of communication apprehension in acquaintance relationships. The results of the study support this hypothesis. Thus, it might be expected that individuals with a high self-esteem would be less apprehensive than those with a low self-esteem. As liking and perceptions

of similarity increase in a relationship, self-esteem may also undergo such changes as well. One of the major problems in the study was the fact that the revised self-esteem measure was designed as a generalized test of self-esteem and, thus, would not be as sensitive to context and time changes as would a situational self-esteem measure. Future research may seek to develop and apply a measure which would tap such changes. Unfortunately, the review of literature did not reveal a satisfactory situational measure.

As reported earlier, approximately 75 percent of the low apprehensives and 74 percent of the high apprehensives were correctly classified by the discriminant function. The high percentage adds further support to the predictive power of these variables. An explanation for the failure to correctly classify even a greater percentage of subjects might be found in the development of MICA as well as the diversity of the subject pool. As a preliminary measure of interpersonal communication apprehension, the three-item MICA certainly needs further work. Additionally, the results reported in this study should be interpreted in light of the percentage of variance accounted for by the discriminant function. Future analyses may account for more of the total variance when other predictors are considered and when the MICA gains stability.

Probably the test of any research project lies in its heuristic value. In this respect, several possibilities are worthy of discussion. In the first place, as an exploratory study, these findings need replication in order to stabilize the suggested relationships. Future research might profitably investigate other contexts of communication such as work settings. Given these relationships (i.e., liking) it does not seem likely that apprehension would be as significant a factor in the friendship and family contexts. Such an assumption might, however, also be tested.

Secondly, this study utilized subjects from two subgroups varying in age. Future studies might seek to determine what, if any, differences exist between younger and older, or college and non-college population.

Finally, the present study has introduced the notion of situational, interpersonal communication apprehension. While similarity, liking, and self-esteem have traditionally been examined as contextual or situational concepts, communication apprehension has been seen only as a generalized level of anxiety toward interacting which undergoes change only in response to systematic rewards or punishments for communication attempts. This study sought to treat communication apprehension as a situationally-defined variable, and while such an analysis could still be defined in terms of situational non-systematic rewards or punishments, the implication is that apprehension may not be the inflexible, general phenomenon it has previously been thought to be. Actual apprehension encountered in a given situation may either be a deviation from some internal general level or apprehension may be totally situational. Further research is necessary to better define the relationship between general and context specific apprehension levels. Additional research with a revised MICA holds great promise for future interpersonal relationship theory and research.

APPENDIX A
ATSCALE RESULTS

SCALE	CRONBACH'S ALPHA
MICA	.750
Attitude Similarity	.862
Value Similarity	.608
Background Similarity	.702
Liking	.822
Self-Esteem	.741

APPENDIX B
WITHIN GROUPS CORRELATION MATRIX

	Liking	Attitude Similarity	Value Similarity	Background Similarity
Attitude Similarity	.3529			
Value Similarity	.0149	.3855		
Background Similarity	.0783	.2469	.0845	
Self-Esteem	-.0554	-.1113	.0104	.3054

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